



Tangled Feelings

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Retold Fairy Tales

Once upon a time there lived a 16 year-old boy, Rafael Patel, who never left his bedroom save to eat his meals. Night after night, day after day, he was incarcerated there by his father, who believed that any outside contact would be bad for his son. He wanted him to have the best possible grades in his GCSEs, and insisted that he spend all his time studying. He was not allowed friends, television, or any time off.

So, night after night, day after day, Rafi would sit with his books and papers, trying to concentrate on his school work, but all he could think about were the days when he was allowed to go to school. He would run his fingers through his thick black hair and think about his friends and his teachers, and seeing people other than his father. He would often cry, and his tears would mix with the ink on his work and blur his writing. But still his father insisted that the only way for him to achieve good grades was to stay in his room and never leave.

One night, while Rafi was concentrating deeply on the formation of oxbow lakes, he heard an unusual sound. A rhythmic “tap, tap, tap” at his bedroom window. He tried to ignore it at first, but the sound continued. Curious, he went to his window and drew back the curtains. Below him stood a boy in the year above him at school, Perry, who had been throwing stones against the glass to get his attention. Rafi was surprised to see him, but he opened up the large window so he could talk to Perry.

The older boy shouted up at him, “Rafi! Where have you been? We’ve all missed you at school. We were wondering why you don’t come to class anymore?”

Rafi put his finger against his lips, trying to indicate to Perry to be quiet. “My dad won’t let me. He thinks home schooling is the best way for me to do well in my GCSEs. I’m not allowed to go out anymore.”

Perry looked concerned. “Well, if you can’t come out and see me, can I come in and see you?”

Rafi thought a little. “Not through the front door; Father is downstairs and he will hear you.” He looked around his bedroom for inspiration, and his eyes settled on a long football scarf that he’d had since childhood.

Working quickly, he tied one end to the leg of his heavy desk and threw the other out the window towards Perry. It was not quite long enough to reach the ground, but it came close enough to Perry so that he could grab it and haul himself up. Deftly, the bigger boy climbed the wall with the help of the scarf and made his way through Rafi’s window.

The two boys talked for half an hour, Perry filling Rafi in on everything that had been happening in the last six months since he left school. At first, Rafi was nervous that his father would hear them, but he was so pleased to have someone else to talk to that he forgot his fear, and began to relax in Perry’s company. Eventually, the time came for Perry to leave. He promised to come back and see Rafi again the next day, and climbed back down the wall again the same way he had come. He gave the boy a cheerful wave before heading off into the night. Rafi waved back, a huge grin across his face, already looking forward to the next evening.

A fortnight passed, during which Perry had come to Rafi’s bedroom window almost every evening, each time climbing up the scarf and into the boy’s bedroom through the window. Rafi looked forward to his visits more and more. It was so long since he had seen other people that he’d almost forgotten how he was supposed to feel around them, but he was sure his feelings towards Perry were stronger than they should be. He pictured the bigger boy’s blue eyes and blond hair when he closed his eyes. He could smell the intriguing citrusy scent that seemed to emanate from him. He had even begun dreaming about him.

That night, Rafi smiled as he heard the familiar “tap tap tap” on the window, and ran to the crumpled scarf in the corner of the room, throwing it down to Perry. He briefly glanced in the mirror, smoothing his thick hair before turning to greet his friend. The pair hugged warmly and sat on the bed, chatting excitedly about Perry’s day. Rafi sometimes felt bad that he never had anything to add to the conversation; never leaving the house meant he had nothing to talk about. But Perry didn’t seem to mind, regaling him with tales of stupid things his friends had said at school, or a silly prank they’d played on one of the teachers. They often played card games

(using a pack of cards Perry would smuggle in with him, as Rafi's father, unsurprisingly, thought all games were a distraction), and sometimes would just lie on the bed and talk about deeper, philosophical topics. Rafi turned to Perry that night and said, "I wish I was pale-skinned, like you."

Perry looked at him, confused. "Why?"

"Well... I don't know. I just think I'm ugly compared to you."

Perry gazed at the younger boy. "Don't be silly, you're not ugly! You've got lovely dark eyes, and your hair is... beautiful..." He reached out and stroked Rafi's hair, brushing his fringe away from his forehead. Rafi's heart began to sing as Perry moved closer to him, and eventually kissed him. The kiss was long and perfect, and Rafi felt like nothing else mattered apart from Perry.

Three more days went by, and Perry's nightly visits continued. The older boy was getting restless now, trying to convince Rafi to ignore his father's instructions and leave the house so they could go into town together. He had even talked about Rafi moving in with his family, but Rafi was too scared of what his father might do to betray him.

That afternoon, Rafi had been working on quadratic equations, but he could feel his mind wandering. He knew he had not been concentrating as hard on his work since Perry had started visiting, and thought it wouldn't be long until his father picked up on that. As if he could read his mind, his bedroom door opened and Mr Patel stormed in, clutching a test paper that he had set Rafi the day before in his fist.

"What do you call this, boy? 70%? That's not good enough." He slammed it down on his son's desk.

"I...I'm sorry Dad, I'll try to do better next time..."

But his father wasn't listening. "What's this you've written here? "Semaine" does not mean "month" in French. Are you stupid?" Rafi shook his head, trying to protest, but his father continued. "And you look a state too. You need a hair cut."

A sudden anger overtook Rafi. "No! Perry likes my hair!" He shouted.

Mr Patel looked confused, his expression deepening. "Who is Perry?"

“Perry is my friend.” An air of defiance ran through Rafi, and all of a sudden he didn’t care what his father might do to him.

“What did I tell you? You’re not allowed to have friends.” And with that, Mr Patel grabbed a handful of Rafi’s thick hair and dragged him to the bathroom, his son yelping in pain. “This is what you get for disobeying me.” He grabbed his electric razor from the bathroom cabinet and sheared all of Rafi’s hair off, clumps of it falling into the sink, the striking blackness contrasting with the white porcelain beneath.

Rafi struggled in his grip but he still didn’t want to give in. “Perry says I can go and live with him and his mum and dad.”

Mr Patel’s face darkened with anger. “Oh really? Well, go and live with whoever you want. You have betrayed me. You are no longer a son of mine.” And with that, Rafi’s father pulled his son downstairs and threw him out of the front door, closing it behind him.

Rafi stood for what seemed like ages outside his house, his eyes streaming with tears. He wanted to go to Perry, but all of a sudden he felt guilty, helpless and embarrassed. How could he have done that to his father? Where had that inner defiance come from? Now, here he was, the first time he had been out of the house for six months, and he was terrified. He ran his hand over his now bare head. He couldn’t let Perry see him like this. What’s more, he didn’t even know where he lived. He skulked over to the little park area across the road and sat beneath a tree, trying to decide what to do.

Perry approached Rafi’s window that night, eager to see him as always. He picked up some stones from the gravel driveway and threw a couple of them at the window, as usual. It wasn’t long before the window opened and the scarf was thrown down. Excitedly, Perry climbed the scarf, and was halfway towards the window before he realised the face looking down at him was not Rafi’s. It was Mr Patel. “You are Perry, I take it?” Perry froze, not knowing what to do. But before he could speak, he realised Mr Patel had something in his hand. It was a pair of scissors. “I would ask you to leave my son alone.” Perry could feel the scarf moving as Rafi’s father began to hack into it with the scissors. Desperately, Perry looked around for something to hold on to, but the wall was bare. He quickly tried to make his way back towards the ground, but it was too late. He was about five feet from the ground when he heard the material of the scarf start to rip... then all of a sudden he was falling through the air. Pain shot through his leg as he landed awkwardly on the ground, his ankle twisted beneath

him. He screamed out, and thought he saw a figure running towards him from the bushes, but blacked out before he had time to look.

The next day, Rafi approached the hospital with trepidation. He had watched Perry's encounter with his father from his secluded hideaway across the road, but had been too scared to intervene. He'd tried to run to Perry when he'd screamed out, but he was unconscious by the time he got to him. He had managed to yell at a passer-by to call for an ambulance, but escaped back into the shrubbery before it had arrived. Here in the hospital would be the first time Perry had seen him since the incident with his father.

He peered around the door of the ward the nurse had told him to go to, and saw Perry, sat up, his ankle in a cast and suspended above the bed. Two older people, a man and a woman, sat next to the bed, presumably his parents. They were all smiling, despite the pain that Perry must have been in.

Rafi hovered in the doorway, unsure whether to approach, when Perry spotted him. "Rafi! Come in! It's good to see you." The older boy held out his hand, and Rafi went to him, taking it gratefully.

"I'm sorry. This is all my fault."

Perry shook his head. "No, it's not. It's your father's fault. The man is evil."

Rafi nodded. "Yes. He's kicked me out. And he did this." He pointed at his shaved head.

Perry stroked his friend's head thoughtfully. "You know, I quite like it!" The pair laughed, and Perry's parents smiled at each other.

Eventually, Perry's dad cleared his throat and spoke. "Rafi, would you like to come and live with us?" At first, Rafi was unsure. But he looked at the couple and saw that they were kind, and Perry was eager. He thought again how handsome Perry looked, even with his leg in a cast and wearing a hospital gown.

"Yes. Yes, I will live with you. Thank you." And so it came to be that Rafael Patel went home with Perry and his mother and father. He went back to school and made a good many more friends. He did well in his GCSEs, and went on to study for his A-Levels, all the while with Perry by his side. The pair lived happily ever after.

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